

Students' Exposure to Social Media and Their Radical Involvement on the Societal Issues in the Philippines

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Abstract

The digital era has had a significant impact on people's perspectives, thus determining whether the vast reach of social media and its free access impacts Filipino teenager's understanding of the issues in the country and their engagement in politics is crucial. The key aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between exposure to social media to the awareness on various social issues and the complex political involvement of youth. The study employed a correlational design of quantitative research approach use to analyze data gathered based on the conducted online survey of senior high school students from Tanauan City Integrated High School. In addition, this study applied a Pearson correlation to determine if a significant correlation existed. Findings showed that there is no significant connection between the respondents' social media exposure and their level of awareness regarding societal issues in the country. On the other hand, there is a significant relationship between the respondents' social media exposure and their level of radical involvement. This research demonstrates how a broader and more advanced understanding of youth's radical political participation associated with more comprehensive measures of social media use can help better understand the role of digital platforms in influencing political participatory behavior and awareness among the internet generation. It is recommendable that future researchers could focus on a different aspect, highlighting the effects of specific social media platform to bring in-depth information about its implications to the political behaviors and awareness of youth in this particular variable.

Keywords: *awareness, politics, radical involvement, social media exposure, youth*

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1. Introduction

The emergence of evolving field in technology has undergone a steep change in the landscape of communication, and it continues to modify citizens' interactive practices. Due to the abundance of information sources on the internet, the general public now has access to a vast amount of data on any aspects especially in politics and social issues. Moreover, it is greatly seen that the digital age in the present times greatly affects the perspective of people thus identifying whether the wide scope of social media and its free access influences the political judgement of the students and the effects on political decisions of the youth is remarkably important. As explained by Lim (2009), social media have paved the way for the youths to increase their political understanding through the re-conceptualization of political engagement. Consequently, through the mounting influence of internet, citizens have developed new ways of participating in elections and public affairs (Chadwick and Howard, 2008).

Inevitably, the understanding about the awareness and knowledge towards politics of the younger generation of Filipinos is essential on building a democratic nation. The key aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between social media exposure to awareness on various social issues and complex political participation of youth. Furthermore, this study showcases whether young people especially senior high school students who use social media to keep up with news and about public affairs, politics and relevant information about the concerns of the country will develop democratically beneficial attitudes and behaviors.

2. Literature review

2.1. Social Media Usage

Nowadays, social media is crucial and widely used by people because of its information. Teenagers between 13 to 19 years old often use social media accounts to access politics and societal issues related news, statistics and data. According to Baumgartner and Morris (2010), through the use of social networking sites, there are greater possibility that young adults can be interested through politics and get some political information through their social network acquaintances. On the other hand, it is exceptionally remarkable that the use of social media for Filipinos in the context of democratic consolidation for the past four years has topped social media users worldwide (Yusingco, 2020). With an average daily screen time of 10 hours, they rank first globally in internet usage (Lamb, 2019). Moreover, a soaring 73.91 million internet

users were recorded in the Philippines as of January 2021. Additionally, the number of internet users in the Philippines increased by 4.2 million (+6.1%) between 2020 and 2021, while the internet penetration in the country stood at 67.0% in January 2021 (Kemp, 2021).

2.2. Awareness to Social Issues

Filipino youth's responses to current societal and governance problems, such as corruption, child violence, armed conflict, and poverty, seemed to be muted. Many have attributed the youth's silence to an implicit sense of apathy and skepticism or disbelief (Medina & Diestro, 2009). According to Velasco (n.d.), in her documentation of reports from 1996 to 2002 on Filipino youth's political participation, reported that the youth's less than positive attitude towards being responsible voters, their minimal participation in the form of social involvement, or their lack of knowledge on the structures of governance, have remained unchanged. The decision to remain uninvolved was reportedly made out of concern that their participation would have a negative impact on their school results. According to Velasco's study, they may have also believed that their participation in political activities would make no difference, or that they would be labeled as communists if they did.

According to Kim and Chen (2016), social networking is having a significant impact on netizens' social and political learning. Likewise, Kahne and Bowyer (2018) indicated the robust political impact of social networking on individuals in various countries. In the context of students, they are active users of new media to obtain political information, share opinions about it and discuss political issues with other members of the community (Hampton et al., 2017).

2.3. Political Involvement

Young people's involvement in formal political processes is important; it brings democratic values to life leading to the overturning of authoritarian practices. They usually engaged in formulating today and tomorrow politics utilizing their rights and knowledge that has been given to them. The public has seen them forward their agenda on various socio-political matters. With the use of social media platforms, they amplify their voice to raise awareness and engagement to strengthen government response to the problems emerging in the country (Medina, 2019). Furthermore, citizens' involvement in acts, events, or activities that influence the selection and/or actions of political representatives is defined as political participation (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013). It refers to the various mechanisms through which citizens can express their

political opinions, exercise their rights, and influence political processes (Chatora, 2012). As a result, it is a civic activity and a vital part of any democracy; an action taken by a citizen to influence the outcome of a political issue. Moreover, many studies have recently questioned the impact of the internet on political participation among the younger population, a task motivated by the general decline in political interest and electoral participation amongst young people across established democracies (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011).

3. Methodology

This study employed the correlational design of quantitative research. This method was chosen because of its fitness to the study. This research was conducted to establish a relationship between two variables, how one influences the other and what are the changes that are eventually observed (McCombes, 2019). This quantitative research design correlated social media exposure with awareness and radical involvement of youth in the political and societal issues in the country using numerical analysis methods.

A total of 100 senior high school students from Tanauan City Integrated High School were purposively chosen as study participants. The respondents were selected based on their suitability to participate wherein all strands were recruited to participate. To generate the quota sample, the study utilized snowball technique to gather multiple respondents. Snowball sampling techniques, also known as chain-referral sampling, are highly recommended when working with the attendees of educational programs or samples of research studies (Mahin et al., 2017).

In order to elicit the information needed, the study used a researcher-constructed validated questionnaire based from related literature and studies. To ensure that the questionnaires were accurate for content validation, the research advisor double-checked every item for any inaccuracies. In addition, the team of experts, who are teachers of various fields and specialization, checked the questionnaire for grammar and structure, and contents and scope. The questionnaire was modified based on the feedback, comments and suggestions given by the internal and external validators. The questionnaire was a four-section survey with analytical, close ended questions along with the 4-point Likert-type rating scale, consisting of multiple indicators in terms of frequency, degree of importance and degree of agreement.

Due to the current restrictions brought by the pandemic, the study was carried out through online with permission from the school head of the Tanauan City Integrated High School for the administration of the questionnaires. A web-based questionnaire through Google forms was used to easily reach wide range of respondents. The respondents were given the freedom to share the same link to the other respondents who were also qualified as per the criteria set. The survey contained a detailed instruction and explanation on the real purpose of the study.

At the start of distributing questionnaires to the participants, pertinent ethical considerations were observed. The study clearly emphasized on voluntary participation and the freedom to refrain from answering the survey at any time. It was also explained that any personal information, and their answers to the survey were treated with utmost confidentiality. The study ensured compliance with the Data Privacy Act and related issuances related to the processing of personal data, upholding the rights of their data subjects, and maintaining compliance with other provisions that are not incompatible with the protection provided by the implementing rules and regulations of Data Privacy Act of 2012.

Pearson correlation was utilized to measure the statistical relationship, or association of social media exposure to awareness to social issues and radical involvement of senior high school students. It is known as the best method of measuring the association between variables of interest because it is based on the method of covariance (Wang, 2013).

4. Findings and Discussion

Table 1 shows the social media exposure of senior high school students in connection with politics and public issues in the country. The result manifested that following one or more online news sources is the most frequent indicator of students' social media exposure to politics and public issues in the country. Thus, with a weighted mean of 3.29, it ranked first. Moreover, reading hard news (ex. politics, crime, economics, international affairs, natural calamities, riots, etc.), keeping updated on the latest news about politics with the use of social media, reacting to any post relating to political and public issues and seeing what their friends think about political issues are the indicators that the respondents are exposed sometimes in social media with a weighted mean of 3.01, 3.00, 2.93, and 2.91, respectively.

Table 1*Senior High School Students' Social Media Exposure in Politics and Public Issues*

Indicators	WM	VI
I follow one or more online news sources.	3.29	Always
I read hard news (ex. politics, crime, economics, international affairs, natural calamities, riots, etc.) via social media.	3.01	Sometimes
I keep updated on the latest news about politics with the use of social media.	3.00	Sometimes
I react to any post relating to political and public issues.	2.93	Sometimes
I see what my friends think about political issues.	2.91	Sometimes
I share political news or information on social media	2.67	Sometimes
I share my opinion in my social media accounts.	2.58	Sometimes
I follow any politicians or political parties.	2.33	Rarely
I re-post photos or videos clips on government or politics.	2.31	Rarely
I follow and interact with official social media accounts of governmental or political institutions.	2.30	Rarely
I join groups for more information about political issues.	2.14	Rarely
I express opinions explicitly on government and politics via social media.	2.11	Rarely
I join topic discussions of politics via social media/ I contributed to a political discussion on the internet	2.05	Rarely
I post political issues on social media and seek help or discussion.	1.96	Rarely
I comment on political news or information on social media.	1.95	Rarely
I attend a political meeting.	1.83	Rarely
I create or sign a petition online	1.80	Rarely
I upload photos or videos shot by yourself on non-recreational latest events.	1.77	Never
I organize non-governmental campaigns or activities via social media.	1.70	Never
I write blogs on government or politics, such as politics, economics, or international relations.	1.52	Never
Composite Mean	2.31	Rarely

Legend: 3.26-4.00 Always 2.51-3.25 Sometimes 1.76-2.50 Rarely 1.00-1.75 Never

With a composite mean of 2.31 interpreted as 'rarely', these results contradict the explanation of Keating and Melis (2017) that youth are redefining their political engagement through the use of social media, which allows them to express their views in new ways. Although many studies showed social media as an effective platform for increasing youth political participation, the results of the social media exposure of the respondents indicate

otherwise. As social media provides a wide range of possibilities for young people to gain knowledge about politics and to become politically conscious of the country's emerging social issues, the participants of the study rarely use social media for political reasons. It also contradicts the findings of Baumgartner and Morris (2010) that the use of social networking sites provides greater chance that young adults will become interested in politics and obtain some political information from their friends and acquaintances on these sites. However, it is evident that the participants are passive by following only online news sources.

Writing blogs on government or politics, such as politics, economics, or international relations has the lowest weighted mean of 1.52. Moreover, the table reflects that the respondents are rarely exposed in organizing a non-governmental campaigns or activities via social media, uploading photos or videos shot by themselves on non-recreational latest events, creating or signing on a petition online, and attending a political meeting with a weighted mean of 1.70, 1.77, 1.80 and 1.83 respectively. These findings are consistent with the United Nations (UN) analysis that the young generation's participation in formal political processes continues to be limited and neglected from mainstream politics and decision-making. Due to a lack of expertise and experience, they struggle to participate in civic activism. Additionally, those under the age of 30 are less likely to be members of political parties than older persons, according to the United Nations Global Youth Report 2016.

Table 2

Senior High School Students' Level of Awareness on Public or Social Issues

Indicators	WM	VI
Corruption	3.82	Fully Aware
Poverty	3.80	Fully Aware
Drugs	3.79	Fully Aware
Crimes and violence	3.79	Fully Aware
Over population	3.77	Fully Aware
Unemployment	3.70	Fully Aware
Homophobia (LGBTQ+ discrimination)	3.69	Fully Aware
Child labor (a form of child abuse)	3.61	Fully Aware
Lack of adequate health care services	3.53	Fully Aware
Racism/xenophobia	3.50	Fully Aware
Terrorism	3.37	Fully Aware
Prostitution	3.34	Fully Aware
Composite Mean	3.64	Fully Aware

Legend: 3.26-4.00 Fully aware 2.51-3.25 Aware 1.76-2.50 Not aware 1.00-1.75 Fully not aware

Table 2 displays the level of awareness of senior high school students regarding societal issues focused on public and social issues. The table indicates the respondents' full awareness when it comes to public issues such as corruption as it has the highest weighted mean of 3.82, while prostitution with the lowest weighted mean of 3.34 that indicates a full awareness of the respondents. Overall, youth are fully aware about the public and social issues of the country maintained with the composite mean of 3.64. These results are related to the statement of Medina (2019) that the public has witnessed young people expressing their stand on a variety of socio-political issues. Youth are usually involved in defining today's and tomorrow's politics, making use of the rights and wisdom that they have. Social media platforms allow them to make their voices heard louder and more effectively, which aids the government in responding more effectively to the country's rising concerns.

Table 3

Senior High School Students' Radical Involvement in terms of Political Involvement

Indicators	WM	VI
I discuss politics with friends or colleagues.	2.54	Sometimes
I sign petition letters.	2.01	Rarely
I had written an article, e.g., in a student's newspaper, organization journal, or the internet.	1.97	Rarely
I voted in elections.	1.87	Rarely
I bought certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons.	1.82	Rarely
I attended a public meeting dealing with political or social issues.	1.82	Rarely
I had written or forwarded a letter/an email with a political content.	1.68	Never
I held a political speech.	1.64	Never
I distributed leaflets with a political content.	1.64	Never
I donated money to support the work of a political group or organization.	1.63	Never
I join demonstrations that are not organized by party officials.	1.61	Never
I wore a badge with a political message.	1.55	Never
I contacted a politician.	1.54	Never
I contact official media to cover the event.	1.51	Never
I boycotted certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons.	1.51	Never
Composite Mean	1.76	Rarely

Legend: 3.26-4.00 Always 2.51-3.25 Sometimes 1.76-2.50 Rarely 1.00-1.75 Never

Table 3 displays the level of radical involvement of the senior high school students in the aspect of political participation. Respondents are sometimes discussing politics with friend or colleagues has the highest weighted mean of 2.54. Correspondingly, signing petitions letters, writing an article related into politics, voting in elections and purchasing certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons has a high weighted mean of 2.01, 1.97, 1.87, and 1.82 respectively. These results imply that students are participating in politics through social media platforms sometimes and rarely only. These results contradict the findings of Bartolde (2007) that many young people are actively involved in politics and activism through the use of digital platforms for establishing social good and community development. Although most of the people use social media to raise public awareness and mobilize support for the government's response (Medina, 2019), the current study showed limited participation of the senior high school students on these issues. Furthermore, the results also contradict the findings of Chatora (2012) that they utilize social media to express their political views, enforce their rights, and influence the political system.

On the other hand, the respondents never boycotted certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons and never contacted official media to cover the event has the lowest weighted mean of 1.51. Moreover, donating money to support the work of a political group or organization, joining demonstrations that are not organized by party officials, wearing a badge with a political message, approaching politicians and official media to cover the event, and contacted a politician has a low weighted mean which are 1.63, 1.61, 1.55, and 1.54, respectively. The results suggest that students avoid participating in political discussion in fear of being exploited using their identity and their respective opinions regarding such matters. Many adolescents are often cautious of being criticized for their actions which then leads them to be uninterested in participating in topics and discussions that can harm their image as well. With that, with a composite mean of 1.76, the data from the table clearly exhibits this fact as most of the answers are within the range of 'rarely' which shows the hesitation and reluctance of the students in political involvement.

These results are consistent with Velasco's (n.d.) documentation of reports from 1996 to 2002 on Filipino youth's political participation, which indicated the youth's negative attitude toward being responsible voters. Their minimal participation in the form of social involvement, and their lack of awareness about governance processes had remained unchanged. The study also

found out that the youth's decision to stay uninvolved was reportedly based on concerns that their engagement might adversely affect their academic performance. Likewise, they thought that participating in politics was meaningless, or that they would be branded as communists if they did (Velasco, n.d.).

Table 4

Correlation Between the Respondents' Social Media Exposure and Level of Awareness on Societal Issues

			Social Issues
Respondents' Social Media Exposure		Pearson Correlation	.088
		Sig. (1-tailed)	.192
		N	100

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

Table 4 presents the correlation between the respondents' social media exposure and their level of awareness regarding societal issues in the country. At 0.05 level of significance, the respondents' social media exposure is not significantly related to their awareness of social issues ($r = .088$). Therefore, there is no direct relationship between the variables. These results suggest that the social media exposure do not affect the involvement and participation of the respondents in regards to the controversial issues that occur within the nation which indicates that the participants often join political discussions through their own interest and choice. This asserts the findings of Chatora (2012) that political participation pertains to the numerous platforms through which citizens may express their political views, exercise their rights, and influence political processes. It also supports the analysis of Bakker and de Vreese (2011) on the downtrend in political interest and electoral participation among young people across established democracies. However, the results contradict the studies of Ahmad et al. (2019) that the majority of students utilize social media for political awareness and knowledge and Diamond (2010) that social media expand social, economic, and political liberty. It affirms Breuer and Groshek (2014) that the platforms provide multiple options for disseminating and retrieving any political-related information, as well as providing, every Internet user with a variety of complimentary access to political information, and activity efficiently in terms of time, money, and effort. Although the

exposure of youth in social media regarding political issues did not influence nor motivate them, the participants are still aware enough on several concerns in the country.

Table 5

Correlation Between the Social Media Exposure and Political Involvement

Respondents' Social Media Exposure	Political Involvement	
Pearson Correlation		.587**
Sig. (1-tailed)		.000
N		100

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

Table 5 displays the correlation between the respondents' social media exposure and their level of radical involvement. At 0.01 level of significance, the respondents' social media exposure is significantly related to political participation ($r = .587$). These results denote that as the respondents' social media exposure increases, the respondents' political participation also increases. These results are similar to the study of Zúñiga et al. (2012) in the United States that people's social capital, civic and political participation are significantly influenced by their ability to obtain information through social networking sites. Relative to the explanation of Milakovich (2010) that exposure to social media increases the citizen participation in the political environment. This was further explained by Diamond (2010) that social network media provides multi-way forms of communication channels compared with other mass media. With a positive correlation between social media exposure and political involvement, this study affirmed the studies of Kim and Chen (2016) that social networking has a substantial influence on netizens' political and social learning and Kahne and Bowyer (2018) that social networking has a notable political impact on individuals in a wider geographic area. It was relatively clear that new media is consistently used to gather political data, express personal views on it, and engage in discussions on political issues with their peers and others in the community (Hampton, Shin, & Lu, 2017).

5. Conclusion

Youth is indeed a powerful force of the society when it comes to the democratic aspect of the country particularly in this day and age. With their young minds, youth exemplify a strong perspective to make the nation enhanced. This study found out the relevance of exposure on social media regarding politics involving social issues, criticism and public demands. The results further support a no significant relationship between the respondents' social media exposure and their level of awareness regarding societal issues in the country while there is a significant relationship between the respondents' social media exposure and their level of radical involvement.

This research demonstrated how a broader and more advanced understanding of youths' radical political participation associated with more comprehensive measures of social media use can help better understand the role of digital platforms in influencing political participatory behavior and awareness among the internet generation. As a democratic country, the youth's exposure to political and social issues develops early awareness on situations that prompt actions. With the power of the social media, the platform should be used to educate more youth on the issues that directly or indirectly affect their growth and development. As such, schools must consider social media as an informal platform to offer different model of social education.

Due to the depth of the topic, the study has some limitations including selection of the samples which may severely affected homogeneity of the responses. Thus, it is recommended that further research could focus on different aspects and examine why youth are apathetic and disengaged in political processes in the digital age or focus on the impact of specific social media platforms (i.e., Facebook, Twitter) to better understand how this affects the political behaviors and awareness of youth.

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